

# Book Reviews

## ANCIENT TO MODERN EUROPE

*The First Century of Welfare: Poverty and Poor Relief in Lancashire, 1620–1730.* By Jonathan Healey. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014. Pp. 335. \$29.95, paper. doi: 10.1017/S0022050716001030

Following in the rich tradition of county histories of early modern English poor relief, Jonathan Healey's monograph on seventeenth-century Lancashire is a welcome addition to the field of the social and economic history of poverty and social welfare. The study mixes a careful reconstruction of the economic history of the county with an intensive study of an underused source—pauper petitions for relief to Justices of the Peace sitting in Quarter Sessions—to create a nuanced analysis of the causes of poverty and the nature of poor relief as it was implemented in the first century after the passage of the Elizabethan Poor Laws.

In line with current understanding, and particularly with Steve Hindle's analysis of the rapid implementation of the "Old Poor Law," Healey convincingly demonstrates that even in low-spending Lancashire, formal poor relief was adopted across the disparate regions of the county well within the first 50 years after the Elizabethan legislation was passed. He uses a wide range of national and local sources in a detailed discussion of the way in which formal poor relief became "entrenched in the county [by a process] of perpetual negotiation between vested interests including not just the central state but the wider patchwork of individual communities" (p. 81). Healey makes an important contribution to the debate over the importance of formal poor relief, showing that parish assistance served as a "comprehensive system of social insurance against risk" for the poor in the seventeenth century (p. 171).

Healey's main interest, however, is in examining the lives of paupers on the margins of society, and in analyzing the causes of poverty. The book's second section traces the now familiar story of people on the margins of society "making shift" with a wide range of economic and family strategies as they sought to remain self-supporting. The importance of neighbors' performing "innumerable petty acts of charity" (p. 156), and the continued prevalence of begging also contributed to a robust network of assistance that those on the margins preferred to exhaust before turning to their parish officers for access to formal poor relief. Healey's use of pauper petitions to trace the struggles of the poor reveals a deep empathy with his subjects, and he manages to pack in a vast number of paupers' narratives without losing a sense of the individuality of each personal history.

In the third, and most substantive section, he argues that the poor who turned to their parishes for formal relief were primarily those who were old, sick, single, or overburdened with children (or some combination thereof). At the same time, in the last section of the monograph, he also shows that economic and disease environments could be crucial determinants of the experiences of poverty. The disparate economies of Lancashire's regions provide contrasting contexts for the implementation of poor relief. In particular, we can see that textile work in the region around the Manchester Quarter Sessions lent a different quality to the lives of the poor, sometimes providing a significant cushion against poverty, but also subjecting residents to the vicissitudes of international trade cycles. While arguing for the major importance of formal poor

relief throughout Lancashire, Healey is also at pains to point out that such assistance was residual, so that while it was genuinely needs-based (not contingent on moral or religious behavior), it was also “aggressively means-tested and a recourse of last resort” (p. 172). While these conclusions are hardly surprising, Healey’s ability to demonstrate their validity through a mix of qualitative and quantitative analysis, and his use of the petitions to bring the voices of the poor to the fore will be much appreciated by historians in this field.

His engagement with the relevant historiography may be less appreciated, as his sometimes dismissive or careless treatment of the work of other historians in the field, and his claims for the novelty of his work can occasionally miss the mark. While his painstaking work with the pauper petitions does give air to many new voices of the poor, he ignores decades of innovative work on a wide range of sources by historians like Steve Hindle, Tim Hitchcock, Marjorie Macintosh, Keith Snell, Tom Sokoll, and many others, when he claims that “These documents ... are the only sources which come close to allowing paupers something like their own voice, and they are the only ones which give *narratives* of poverty” (pp. 171–72). Healey is similarly dismissive of the work of demographers and social historians who have relied on family reconstitution, but it is notable that his own conclusions match theirs almost exactly; why does he choose to tear down their methodology, rather than to build on their conclusions? Healey sarcastically comments that “studies of the Poor Law which highlight the way it tended to support the old are missing the obvious point that poor relief was generally targeted at the bodily infirm” (p. 179). But this claim badly misrepresents the actual nature of the extensive body of work on lifecycle poverty, especially that of Lynn Botelho, Margaret Pelling, Richard Smith, and Pat Thane, which, in fact, focuses precisely on the point that it was generally the functional and cultural rather than the chronological nature of old age that gave rise to parish and charitable support for the elderly. Reading this literature with more care might have allowed him to see the nuanced arguments of historians of old age, and to catch basic errors in his engagement with this field. (For example, I have many tables in my study of eighteenth-century old age that give the proportion of poor relief that went to old paupers, but the table that Healey cites for comparative purposes actually does *not* give that information; it is hardly surprising that this misused data contrasts with his findings!) These points of criticism aside, this is a valuable and engaging book overall, with a careful reconstruction of the economic history of the poor of Lancashire during a critical period in the development of England’s social welfare system.

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*Bordeaux et les Etats-Unis 1776–1815 Politique et stratégies négociantes dans la genèse d’un réseau commercial.* By Silvia Marzagalli. Genève: Librairie Droz, 2015. Pp. 11, 559, \$60.78 paperback; \$48.62 pdf.  
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Silvia Marzagalli’s *Bordeaux et les Etats-Unis* is a book that crosses boundaries. It brings together an unlikely transatlantic and trans-imperial pair, Bordeaux and the United States, and in so doing ranges across the Old Regime and Revolutionary periods